



GERALD COUCH
Sheriff

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

HALL COUNTY, GEORGIA

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My fellow citizens of Hall County,

In recent weeks, I have watched and listened as Governor Nathan Deal announced a substantial salary increase for state law enforcement officers as part of his ongoing effort to transform and improve our criminal justice system. In some quarters this announcement was met with high approval; in others, it has been viewed with skepticism and some concern that making state jobs more attractive will pull candidates and employees away from county or municipal law enforcement agencies.

As your elected Sheriff, I am charged with overseeing operation of the county jail, protecting the county courthouse, administering civil process, and the service of warrants, among myriad other duties- not the least of which is providing law enforcement services to the unincorporated areas of Hall County. To accomplish all of this, I have over 450 personnel on staff, all of whom are employees of the Hall County Government. I mention this because some of those who have voiced disapproval in the Governor's plan have gone as far as suggesting that the state should become involved in the salary matters of local government employees.

First and foremost, I want to publicly express my support of Governor Deal's initiative. Pay increases for our state law enforcement officers are long overdue. For years, they have lagged behind national averages and as a result, have faced difficulty in attracting quality candidates and keeping their ranks filled, which in turn reduces the amount of support they can provide to local agencies. While some might argue that this is the state's problem, the reality is that our local law enforcement agencies and the citizens they serve also suffer the effects. Here are just a few examples of the support we receive:

- The Georgia State Patrol and the Hall County Sheriff's Office have an outstanding working relationship. Many, if not most of the motor vehicle crashes in the county are handled by State Troopers. If a Trooper doesn't work a crash, then a County Deputy must do it, which means that Deputy is not available to answer 911 calls.
- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources works in partnership with the Sheriff's Office to patrol Lake Lanier's 38,000 acres, about 60% of which lies within Hall County. This involves everything from watercraft accident investigations and BUI enforcement to the recovery of drowning victims.
- The Georgia Bureau of Investigation provides support to the Sheriff's Office in the form of crime lab services, assisting with crime scene processing in complex cases, tactical support from their explosive ordinance disposal unit, and when necessary, they serve as an independent investigative agency in certain internal investigations.

These state agencies, among others, all have a long history of supporting us at a moment's notice with an abundance of resources, enabling us to do our jobs better, more efficiently, and ultimately deliver better services to the citizens of Hall County.

Secondly, I believe that control of our county government lies solely with our local elected and appointed officials, and I am opposed to the idea of the state influencing the pay rates of city and county law enforcement officers. The Hall County Board of Commissioners has supported the Sheriff's Office, and we have worked together very diligently to realize a successful recovery from austere times. This has provided pay increases for our employees to not only reward them for their hard work and dedication, but to make our agency competitive with surrounding jurisdictions in the quest for quality law enforcement candidates. While we are grateful for the support of the state, our internal successes are the result of relationships that are built and fostered locally, among men and women who live and work here in Hall County, not at the State Capitol.

In closing, Governor Deal's efforts are a positive step toward making law enforcement in Georgia what it is supposed to be: the best in the nation. His actions will serve to raise the level of professionalism and training among our ranks, and that will benefit all of the citizens of Georgia. The Governor and I both recognize that as our society moves forward, interagency cooperation and teamwork are essential. As I've stated before, no matter the shape of the badge or the color of the uniform, those of us in public safety are all on the same team, working toward a common goal. I look forward to continued collaboration between the Hall County Sheriff's Office and the many state agencies that we work with as we strive to deliver the best services possible to our citizens.

Sincerely

Sheriff Gerald Couch